

Reluctance and Determination

The Prelude to the Austro-Hungarian Occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878

The Great Powers' diplomatic *démarches* preceding the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary in 1878 are marked with many ambiguities and paradoxes. Although historians have greatly succeeded in bringing to the surface what (in all probability) happened, in explaining hidden moves and motives, and even in gearing one to another a great variety of – mainly nationalistically biased – points of view, these ambiguities and contradictions have continued to contribute to the Austro-Hungarian occupation being the subject of divergent interpretations and controversies in the light of new conceptual approaches to history, e.g. (post)colonial studies. This paper aims at pointing out some of the ambiguities and paradoxes of Vienna's late 19th century Balkan policy, produced by both the dual structure of the empire and its complex relations with Russia, and still puzzling contemporary researchers fathoming the 'true nature' of the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The involvement of the Habsburg Empire in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in the Balkans is an aspect of the so-called »Eastern Question« (*Orientfrage*), created by the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the claims laid on parts of its territory by other powers.¹ The Eastern Question emerged by the end of the 18th century and reached its apogee between the Crimean War (1853-1856) and World War I. In fact it had its very first beginning at the end of the 17th century already, when the Holy League consisting of the Habsburg Empire, Poland, Venice, and eventually Russia defeated the Ottoman army on several occasions and imposed the Treaties of Karlowitz and Passarowitz in 1699 and 1718 respectively. The whole of Ottoman Hungary including the Ottoman vassal principality of Transylvania was ceded to the Habsburg Empire. The conquest was presented as the restoration of the Habsburg legal rights on the Hungarian lands acquired in 1526 when King Lajos/Ludvík II of Hungary and Bohemia felt without issue in the battle of Mohács. Venice considerably enlarged her

possessions in Dalmatia. As a result, Bosnia-Herzegovina turned into a huge Ottoman enclave almost completely enclosed by Habsburg and Venetian territory.

The Eastern Question entered a new stage in 1774 after Russia defeated the Ottoman Empire and concluded the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca. Russia obtained the right to free navigation both on the Black Sea and through the Bosphorus while annexing a part of the north-eastern shoreline of the Black Sea that was likely to serve as a basis for further expansion to the Balkans. Although Austria was alarmed, due to the friendly atmosphere of the partitions of Poland carried out in the same period, Joseph II cautiously supported the »Greek Project« launched by Catherine the Great. This »Project« provided a sort of blueprint of both empires' policies regarding the Ottoman Empire until World War I. The Western Caucasus, the Crimea and the lands east of the Dniestr were to be annexed by Russia, and parts of Wallachia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Istria and Dalmatia by the Habsburg Empire. The Byzantine Empire should be restored as well – with Constantinople as its capital and Catherine's son as the king. Well aware that the partition of the Balkans would also cause tensions, Catherine envisaged the creation of a Kingdom of Dacia as a buffer state.²

The 1815 Treaty of Vienna assigned formerly Venetian Dalmatia to Vienna. Bosnia-Herzegovina was now enclosed by Habsburg territory, except in the east where both provinces were linked to the rest of the Ottoman Empire through the Sandžak of Novi Pazar – a long, narrow corridor between Serbia and Montenegro. For the Ottomans, Bosnia-Herzegovina had become extremely vulnerable to a possible Habsburg assault. To the Austrians, Dalmatia, an even longer and narrower strip of land between Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Adriatic, had become even more difficult to defend against an Ottoman aggression.

Once the Treaty of Vienna ended the turmoil of the Napoleonic wars, the cooperation between Vienna and St.-Petersburg in the Balkans resumed. Both empires were among the members of the 1815 Holy Alliance and the 1815 Quadruple Alliance, aimed at preserving the *status quo* in Europe. While Austria, facing liberal and nationalist unrest in Germany and in her own realm, advocated the maintenance of the *status quo* in the Ottoman Empire as well, Russia continued her former policy of destabilizing and corroding it. The Holy Alliance shook to its foundation when during the Greek crisis (1821-1830) Metternich interceded for Russia with the Sublime Porte, but opposed the looming dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire as soon as Serbia got involved in the conflict. In Vienna, however the Russian protectorate over the Danubian Principalities, which lasted from 1829 to 1856, was perceived as an additional threat from the east. Nevertheless, the September 1833 Treaty of Münchengrätz stipulated that if the Ottoman Empire collapsed, Austria and Russia would nevertheless cooperate to establish a new balance of power in the region.³ The Russian suppression of the 1848 Hungarian uprising is a notorious illustration of both

empires' mutual understanding, although it did not placate the latent distrust in Vienna. With the Habsburg statesmen, it provoked – in addition to the sudden awareness of the explosive nature of the nationalist tensions in the empire – the uneasy feeling of dependency of St.-Petersburg, while among the Hungarians, it sowed hatred towards Russia and added to their suspicion of the South Slavs.⁴ During the 1853-1856 Crimean War the tsar still believed that the national interests of Vienna and St.-Petersburg regarding the Ottoman Empire were »perfectly identical« and even proposed to turn the Balkans into a common Russian-Habsburg protectorate.⁵ The Habsburg Empire, however, fearing stirring up nationalistic feelings among the South Slavs within and outside its borders and being well aware of the Russians' preponderant influence among the Balkan Orthodox Slavs, initially refused taking sides but eventually sent troops to the Russian administered Danubian Principalities, thus sealing the fate of Russia.

After the 1856 Treaty of Paris, St.-Petersburg avoided overtly being implicated in Balkan issues. However, many Russian diplomats secretly fostered Pan-Slavist ideas.⁶ Count Nikolaj Ignatjev, the Russian ambassador to Istanbul from 1864 to 1877, quietly encouraged Balkan revolutionaries to take up arms, holding out the prospect of a Russian military intervention. For her part, Vienna had been forced by unfortunate wars with Italy and Prussia in 1859 and 1866 to solve without delay her internal problems – carrying out the 1867 *Ausgleich* – and to keep a low profile in the Balkans as well. The policy adopted by Metternich in 1815 that aimed at the preservation of the territorial integrity of the rather harmless Ottoman Empire continued to be regarded as the best protection against threats from the south.

In 1873, due to her newly appointed foreign minister count Gyula Andrásy, Austro-Hungary joined Germany and Russia in the rather loose *Dreikaiserbund*. As one of the architects of the *Ausgleich*, Andrásy was in favour of the German-Hungarian predominance within the Dual Monarchy and therefore advocated cooperation with Germany.⁷ Andrásy made clear to his Russian counterpart, the moderate and pro-Western Aleksandr Gorčakov, that the Dual Monarchy did not intend to interfere in Balkan affairs, but would nevertheless take over Bosnia-Herzegovina rather than leaving it to (Russia's traditional ally) Serbia.⁸ As a Hungarian, Andrásy actually distrusted the Russians, considering that »it remains Austria's mission to be as before a stronghold against Russia«, because »only as long as she performs that mission her existence will be a European necessity«.⁹

Thus, at the eve of the 1878 Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Habsburg Empire's involvement in the Balkans had a long history already, marked by a complex relationship of cooperation and competition with Russia. From the point of view of cooperation, the looming occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina appears as just a step in the realization of an ambitious

imperialist or colonialist project. In the light of the rivalry with Russia, the Habsburg 19th-century Balkan policy might as well have been a form of self-defence – as Austro-Hungarian statesmen claimed.¹⁰ Austria-Hungary feared that Russia's real or perceived policy of encircling her through Wallachia and Moldova in the east would one day be completed in the south if Russia gained a foothold among the Balkan Slavs. Again, given the fact that the Dual Monarchy did not stand a chance in a military confrontation with Russia, the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire offered the best protection against this nightmare.¹¹

Although after the recent military defeats Emperor Franz Joseph might have been interested in restoring his damaged prestige through a new conquest, there were also internal circumstances that prevented Austria-Hungary from venturing into a military operation in the Balkans. The main factor was the increasing threat of South Slav nationalism. The Habsburg South Slavs, having obtained already some degree of autonomy within the Kingdom of Hungary through the 1868 *Nagodba* (*Compromise*), insisted on the creation of a political entity consisting of former Austrian and Hungarian South Slavic lands and enjoying the same footing as the Austrian and the Hungarian entities (*trialism*) – a solution that would seriously jeopardize the fragile dual construction of the Monarchy.¹² As the acquisition of new territories in the Balkans would increase the number of South Slavs within the empire even more, the Habsburg establishment, the German liberals as well as Hungarian politicians were opposed to it. In 1869, Andrásy (then still prime minister of Hungary) and Benjamin von Kállay, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador to Belgrade, still explicitly rejected the idea of involvement in Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹³ Only the Habsburg Croats were in favour of it. During a conference in February 1872, Andrásy stated that although the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina was »wünschenswert« (desirable), the Empire had no choice but following a defensive policy given the general lack of »nationale Begeisterung« (national enthusiasm) among the population in the empire for a military operation.¹⁴

Beyond the border, a powerful independent Serbian state (especially when supported by Russia) represented a considerable military threat to the Dual Monarchy. For Vienna, the policies of supporting the Ottoman dominance to prevent Serbia's expansion, and encouraging Albanian, Greek and Romanian territorial ambitions as a counterbalance to the Serb ones were still seen as appropriate measures. In addition, Vienna made an attempt to establish friendly relations with Serbia in order to win it over by sending the pro-Serb Benjamin Kállay as an ambassador to Belgrade in 1868.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the mere existence of an independent Serbian state fuelled the Habsburg South Slavs' political ambitions. To the extent these were not achieved, Serbia offered the Habsburg South Slavs the alternative of secession and joining the Principality of Serbia.

So the 19th-century Habsburg Balkan policy was alert and active, but basically conservative and defensive. In many respects, Russia's alleged age-old ally in partitioning the Ottoman Balkans often preferred siding with the Western powers and especially Great Britain, which feared Russia laying hands on the Bosphorus. From the 1850s onwards, there had indeed been several projects emerging from the military lobby in Vienna to take over adjacent Balkan regions as far as Macedonia whenever the risks were low, but they all turned out to be ephemeral and vague.¹⁶

By the mid-1870s, however, the Habsburg Balkan policy of keeping the *status quo* began to crumble. As a result of the Habsburg government's new approach of coordinating foreign policy with military capacity, the military lobby acquired a greater influence on foreign affairs.¹⁷ The military pointed out that taking over Bosnia-Herzegovina would shorten the existing Habsburg-Ottoman border line of 900 kilometres by 525 kilometres¹⁸, offer protection to the vulnerable Dalmatian possessions, and secure direct access to Serbia and Montenegro.¹⁹ In addition, the ever-present danger of local uprisings which could potentially result in the territorial expansion of Serbia – as they had in the establishment of the Principality of Serbia in 1829-1830 – could be partly eliminated by imposing peace and order in Bosnia-Herzegovina through Habsburg administration.²⁰

In addition to these strategic considerations, there were also economic reasons for taking over Bosnia-Herzegovina. In fact, the integration of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Dual Monarchy's economic sphere of influence had reached such a level that political integration had become a corollary. Bosnia-Herzegovina had developed into a Habsburg economic hinterland. After the 22 May 1862 commercial agreement with the Ottoman Empire, the Dual Monarchy reduced the custom-tariffs for goods originating from Bosnia-Herzegovina, which resulted in 70-80% of both the Bosnian exports to the Dual Monarchy (wood, cereals, cattle, plums and *šljivovica*) and the Habsburg exports to the region (textile, leather, and other industrial products) travelling through Vienna and Trieste.²¹ It was estimated that the Bosnian export could triple if the province was administered properly. In turn the Dalmatian harbours were greatly depending on the trade with Bosnia-Herzegovina. Especially after the 1873 depression, commercial circles in Vienna insisted upon measures to stimulate the trade with the East.²² Yet when uprisings broke out, the commercial output declined. This was an additional incentive for Austria-Hungary to take – if necessary military – measures in order to impose peace and order in the provinces.²³

Having been appointed as Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, Andrassy was increasingly inclined to abandon his former »Hungarian« stands and adopt genuine »k. & k.« views.²⁴ On 29 January 1875, during a ministerial conference in Vienna on the issue of Bosnia-Herzegovina, he quite explicitly renounced his former *Abstinenzpolitik*, adhering now to the principle »Macht geht über

Rechts.²⁵ Nevertheless, remaining a cautious and shrewd politician, he considered as before that

Turkey is of almost providential utility to Austria. Her existence is essential to our well-understood interests. She keeps the status quo of the small states and hinders their aspirations to our advantage. Were there no Turkey, then all these heavy duties would fall on us.²⁶

As Franz Joseph tended to support the military lobby, the conference decided nevertheless that an uprising in Bosnia-Herzegovina would be seized as a pretext for an occupation of the two provinces.²⁷ When the decision to annex both provinces was made, Andrassy, who was in favour of the idea but aware of the risks, gave in.²⁸ In spring 1875, on the initiative of the military lobby, the Emperor made a trip through Dalmatia that caused a lot of agitation among the Christian population in Bosnia-Herzegovina. At the end of the trip, he declared that an occupation of two provinces was near and ordered his troops in Dalmatia to prepare for an invasion. The emperor's trip is regarded as having considerably contributed to the outbreak of the uprising of the Christian population in Herzegovina in July the same year.²⁹ The immediate cause of the uprising was the killing of a Franciscan priest who had met with Franz Joseph in Dalmatia.³⁰ The uprising soon spread to the whole of Bosnia. The insurgents demanded the abolition of the feudal obligations and the full implementation of the Ottoman reform programme known as *Tanzimat*. While volunteers from Serbia and other Slav areas flocked in, the Bosnian Serbs declared their loyalty to the Principality of Serbia.³¹ The brutal repression of the uprising in autumn and winter 1875 resulted in about 200,000 refugees pouring into Austro-Hungarian territory. International indignation and preparedness to intervene grew, especially in Russia.

If the Dual Monarchy had purposefully provoked the uprising, she now seemed to be quite embarrassed by the consequences. Initially, Russia and the Dual Monarchy confined themselves to exchanging joint diplomatic notes with the Porte, anxious not to spoil the good relations the *Dreikaiserbund* had established between them and not to negotiate without the support of the other Powers.³² In August 1875, the consuls of the *Dreikaiserbund* to Istanbul made the Porte promise to introduce reforms and to allow the Bosnian Christians to participate in local administration. The insurgents rejected this and several other following concessions by the sultan. The Austro-Hungarian and Russian foreign services also explored the terms of a bilateral cooperation. In October 1875, Andrassy rejected a Russian proposal to give autonomy to Bosnia-Herzegovina as unworkable and a dangerous precedent for other Slav nations.³³ On 30 December 1875, fearing a Russian intervention, he issued a note (known as the *Andrassy Note* or the *Reformnote*), written in consultation with Russia and approved by the signatories of the 1856 Treaty of Paris. The Note demanded that the Porte initiate extensive land reforms to be supervised by a Christian-Muslim

commission. Clearly the idea of creating an autonomous province had been abandoned. The demands were to a large extent complied with by the Sublime Porte, but again the local insurgents remained unsatisfied.³⁴

In the meantime, the unrest had spread to Bulgaria, where an uprising broke out in April 1876. The atrocities which accompanied the suppression of the uprising again provoked great indignation not only in Russia but also in Great Britain. On 30 May 1876, the foreign ministers of the *Dreikaiserbund* issued the *Berlin Memorandum*, repeating the demands included in the *Andrássy Note* and threatening the Ottoman Empire with »mesures efficaces« if nothing was done. It was agreed upon that in case the Ottoman Empire collapsed, Austria-Hungary would take over Bosnia-Herzegovina and Russia would regain South Bessarabia.³⁵ The *Berlin Memorandum* was endorsed by France and Italy, but rejected by the British Prime Minister Disraeli who felt passed over and disliked the idea of »putting the knife to the throat of Turkey.«³⁶ The Ottomans as well declined it, indignant about the menaces it contained and reassured by the British refusal.³⁷ Andr  ssy would later blame the Britons for having provided the Russians with a pretext for war by encouraging Ottoman intransigence.³⁸

Things were further complicated in the beginning of July 1876 by the war Serbia and Montenegro waged on the Ottoman Empire in spite of the warnings they had received from Vienna and St.-Petersburg not to do so. Fearing an Austro-Hungarian intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina and covertly encouraged by Ignatjev, they decided to attack nevertheless, having agreed that Serbia would annex Bosnia and Montenegro Herzegovina.³⁹ Yet both motley armies were easily crushed by the Ottomans by the end of October 1876, and the tsar – infuriated by the Moscow Slav Committee’s sending the retired Russian general Michail Ćernjaev to command the Serbian army – now had to give an ultimatum to the sultan in order to save Serbia from Ottoman occupation.⁴⁰

On the initiative of Disraeli, representatives from Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia convened in December 1876 in Istanbul to discuss the crisis. In January 1877, after long negotiations, the participants endorsed a set of administrative reforms consisting, among other things, of the division of the Ottoman Balkans into a number of autonomous regions – Bosnia-Herzegovina being one of them – each of which would have a provincial assembly and a local police force under a governor appointed by the sultan and the Great Powers.⁴¹ Russia had worked hard to increase the international pressure on the Porte, hoping to achieve a number of her Balkan policy aims (like a vast autonomous province in Bulgaria) without warfare. As she disliked the idea of establishing autonomous provinces, the Dual Monarchy was rather reluctant. On 18 January, the Ottoman government rejected the new reform plan as well.

Except for Russia, the powers actually had exerted little pressure on the sultan to meet the requirements. Great Britain, Germany and Austria-Hungary

insisted upon reforms as a means of saving the Ottoman Empire rather than weakening it and neither was prepared to threaten the Ottoman Empire with a military intervention. But the efforts of the Powers to find a solution to the crisis did not keep pace with the political developments in Istanbul. On the morning of 23 December 1876, when the first plenary session of the Istanbul Ambassadors Conference took place, sultan Aldülhamit, pressurized by a group of veteran reformers who had brought him to power a couple of months before, promulgated a Constitution that gave equal civil rights to all the citizens in the empire of whatever creed. This act rendered irrelevant most of the reforms half-heartedly insisted upon by the Great Powers. Nevertheless, urged by Russia, which obviously needed a pretext for war, the Powers convened again in London. By removing a number of minor clauses, the Protocol of London signed on 31 March 1877 reduced the »irreducible minimum« agreed upon in Istanbul to »the quintessence«.⁴² Russia, still fearing that the Sublime Porte might accept the truncated requirements, added a note demanding the sultan to send a special envoy to St.-Petersburg to discuss disarmament.⁴³ On 9 April the Sublime Porte refused to comply and on 24 April Russia declared war.

While participating in the »official«, Great Powers' negotiations with the Sublime Porte, Austria-Hungary and Russia had been working behind the scenes on a settlement in case ongoing and looming war(s) would result in border changes. On 26 June 1876 already, prior to the outbreak of the Serbo-Montenegrin war against the Ottoman Empire, Andrassy and Gorčakov reached a comprehensive agreement in Reichstadt (in Bohemia) on a possible partition of the Balkans if the Ottoman Empire would not comply with the demands formulated in the *Berlin Memorandum*. If the Ottomans were victorious, Austria-Hungary and Russia would intervene in favour of the Christians to re-establish the *status quo ante*. (This eventually happened.) In case Serbia and Montenegro prevailed, both powers would settle the consequences of the war in common. However, »neither favored the formation of a large Slav state« (»elles ne favorisèrent par l'établissement d'un grand État Slave [...]«).⁴⁴ According to the Russian version of the agreement, Serbia would be allowed to annex some parts of Old Serbia and Bosnia, and Montenegro would receive Herzegovina and a harbour on the Adriatic; in exchange, Austria-Hungary would be entitled to annex »Croatian Turkey and some adjacent parts of Bosnia« (»la Croatie turque et quelques parties de la Bosnie contigües à ses frontières«) as this was regarded as »a vital condition without which she could not accept the enlargement of the neighbouring Slav Principalities« (»une condition vitale sans laquelle elle ne pourrait admettre un agrandissement des Principautés slaves voisines«), while Russia would regain Southern Bessarabia. In the Austro-Hungarian version, however, the Dual Monarchy was to take the lion's share of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The two versions would eventually cause misunderstandings between

Vienna and St.-Petersburg.⁴⁵ Other solutions were provided lest the war would result in »the total collapse« (»l'entier écoulement«) of the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁶

On 15 January 1877 in Budapest Gorčakov and Andrassy signed the *Convention secrète entre la Russie et l'Autriche-Hongrie*.⁴⁷ It was basically a military agreement, stipulating that in case the Porte rejected the demands of the Istanbul Ambassadors Conference – as she did three days later – and Russia would declare war, Austria-Hungary would remain neutral and try »to paralyse through diplomatic action, as far as it depended on her, the attempts which might make the other Powers to intervene or to mediate« (»paralyser, autant qu'il depend de lui, par son action diplomatique, les essais d'intervention ou de médiation collective que pourraient tenter d'autres Puissances«, Art. II). In exchange, Austria-Hungary »reserved the right to choose the moment and the means to make her troops occupy Bosnia-Herzegovina« (»se réserve le choix du moment et du mode de l'occupation de la Bosnie et de l'Herzégovine par ses troupes«, Art. VII). The Dual Monarchy would refrain from military action in Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro, and Russia would do the same in Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro (Art. VIII). Territorial arrangements in case of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire were to be regulated »by a special and simultaneous convention« (»par une convention spéciale et simultanée« Art. IX). In the *Convention additionnelle*, added on 18 March (according to Anderson) and antedated, the term »annexation« is used instead of »occupation«.⁴⁸ Moreover, in Article 3 it was stated that »in case of territorial changes or the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire the formation of a great compact Slav or other state would be excluded« (»[e]n cas d'un remaniement territorial ou d'une dissolution de l'empire ottoman l'établissement d'un grand état compact slave où autre est exclu«).⁴⁹

Both *Conventions* favoured Austria-Hungary: she was offered territorial gains in return for mere neutrality and diplomatic support, while Russia would do the warfare without the prospect of territorial gains. However, reminiscent of what had happened during the Crimean War, Russia considered Austro-Hungarian neutrality of utmost importance. It did not mean that Russia had renounced her Balkan territorial ambitions, however. As a result of the *Convention secrète*, Russia rather abandoned her interests in the Western Balkans to focus on Bulgaria, which (to her) was a much more realistic option after all.⁵⁰

Both the Reichstadt and Budapest Agreements reveal Andrassy as an active participant in the diplomatic moves aimed at getting control over Bosnia-Herzegovina. Von Wertheimer rightly calls the latter agreement »den Kernpunkt seiner diplomatischen Erfolge.«⁵¹ From May to July 1877, Andrassy negotiated with Disraeli as well, but no agreement was reached. Austria-Hungary would enter an alliance with Great Britain only if Russia would violate the *Convention secrète* either by annexing territory, creating a large Slav state on the right bank of the Danube, or by occupying Istanbul. Meanwhile Great Britain

insisted upon the British navy transporting Austro-Hungarian troops to the Bosphorus.⁵² At the same time, Andrásy encouraged Great Britain to defend the Straits by military means and suggested Austria-Hungary could easily force Russia to withdraw from the Balkans by attacking them in the rear.⁵³ Obstructing a Western intervention, Andrásy actually stuck to the promise made to Russia in the *Convention secrète*, and at the same time kept Great Britain in reserve in case Russia would not stick to hers. For the time being, however, Russia, too, remained faithful to the agreement. During negotiations with Serbia on the participation of the latter in the Russo-Turkish war, she declined Serbia's claim on Bosnia-Herzegovina as a possible war gain.⁵⁴ Vienna warned the Serbs not to enter Bosnia-Herzegovina and rather perfidiously encouraged them to send their troops southwards to Macedonia – an area coveted by Russia's protégées the Bulgarians – although the Serbian troops were needed much more to assist the Russian army cornered in Northern Bulgaria.⁵⁵

By the end of January 1878, the Russian army reached the outskirts of Istanbul. On 23 January 1878, Great Britain, having repeatedly warned Russia not to occupy the Straits, ordered her Mediterranean fleet (which had already dropped anchor near the Dardanelles) to head for Istanbul. Little more could be done, but it was enough to make Russia consent to an armistice signed in Edirne on 31 January. At the beginning of February, the Dual Monarchy displayed a greater preparedness to enter a military alliance with Great Britain and even sounded out London on a subsidy, but finally no troops were made available to support a possible British intervention.⁵⁶ According to Medlicott, »[i]t is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Andrásy was conscious of the advantage of holding back in the hope the impetuosity of the British government would lead it to bear the risks of war alone.«⁵⁷

Due to the British war threat Russia had not reached her final goal, the Bosphorus, but she had won a victory impressive enough to enable her to negotiate with the Porte from a position of power. The 3 March 1878 Treaty of San Stefano created a large Bulgarian autonomous tributary principality, including Macedonia, Thrace, the Western part of Serbia and a small part of present-day Albania. It would be occupied by a Russian army of 50,000 and administered by Russia for two years before attaining full independence. Serbia, Montenegro and Romania were to become promoted from the status of tributary principalities of the Ottoman empire to independent states. Serbia would also annex the regions of Niš and the Drina River and a part of the Sandžak of Novi Pazar, while Montenegro would acquire two harbours on the Adriatic Coast and the remaining part of the Sandžak.

The Treaty was a violation of the *Convention Secrète* in many respects. The Convention had stipulated that new territorial formations should result from mutual consultation and negotiation. Now, Russia had single-handedly created a great Bulgarian state and given common borders to Serbia and Montenegro,

enabling them to unify and create a powerful Serbian state at the southern borders of Austria-Hungary. The Treaty also omitted mentioning the occupation, let alone annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Dual Monarchy. Article XIV only stated that:

The European proposals [the creation of an autonomous province, RD] communicated to the Ottoman Plenipotentiaries at the first sitting of the Constantinople Conference shall immediately be introduced into Bosnia-Herzegovina, with any modifications which may be agreed upon in common between the Sublime Porte, the Government of Russia, and that of Austria-Hungary.⁵⁸

Vienna feared that an autonomous province of Bosnia-Herzegovina would be an easy prey for Serbia. (This fear was not unjustified. The autonomous province of Eastern Rumelia, created by the Treaty of Berlin later in 1878, was annexed with impunity by the Principality of Bulgaria in 1885.)

Already in January 1878, Franz Joseph had warned the Russian *tsar* that Europe would not accept the creation of Bulgarian state of that size and proposed to convoke a large international conference in Vienna to discuss a peace settlement with the sultan. He made it understood that if Russia annexed Southern Bessarabia, Austria-Hungary would insist on annexing Bosnia-Herzegovina, as was agreed upon in the *Convention secrète*.⁵⁹ While continuing to bargaining with Russia, however, Austria-Hungary drew closer to Great Britain. She increasingly supported Foreign Office Secretary Lord Salisbury's disapproval of the Treaty of San Stefano; in exchange Great Britain supported the Austro-Hungarian claim on Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In the beginning of March, Disraeli, backed by Andrassy, initiated plans for a conference of the Great Powers to discuss the border settlements in the Balkans. The Porte was informed and the *tsar*, aware of both his country's war exhaustion and reminiscent of the disastrous conclusion of the Crimean War, accepted as well. The outlines of the forthcoming agreement were decided upon by the three main parties involved – Russia, Austria-Hungary and Britain – before the start of the congress. Andrassy initially demanded the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Sandžak of Novi Pazar and a part of the Montenegrin coastline, but on 17 April (in the face of Russian objections) he finally agreed to the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina alone.⁶⁰ Russia and Great Britain reached a preliminary agreement on 30 May; Great Britain and the Dual Monarchy concluded negotiations on 6 June.⁶¹

The March 1878 Treaty of San Stefano was revised during the Congress of Berlin from 11 June to 13 July 1878. It was presided by the German *Reichskanzler* Otto von Bismarck, who was not interested at all in the Balkans. His main concern was saving the *Dreikaiserbund* by reconciling Russia and Austria-Hungary. Austria-Hungary was represented by Count Andrassy; Russia sent Gorčakov; and Great Britain Lord Salisbury. Karatodori pasha – a Greek – acted for the Ottoman Empire. During the first seven sessions, it was decided to replace

Great Bulgaria with a much smaller Principality of Bulgaria (an Ottoman vassal state) and an Ottoman autonomous province of Eastern Rumelia. During the eighth session, the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina was discussed. Andr ssy was more afraid of possible disapproval at home than of the resistance of the other participants, whom he had contacted all (except for Karatodori pasha) in advance.⁶² He opposed the creation of an Ottoman autonomous province of Bosnia-Herzegovina, pointing out the importance of the matter not only for the Ottoman Empire, but for Europe as a whole. He stressed that the Ottoman Empire had been unable to keep peace and order in Bosnia-Herzegovina, asked the Porte to request Austro-Hungarian troops to intervene in Bosnia-Herzegovina »to save the Ottoman and the Austrian Empires from the Serbian and the Montenegrin menace«, and then proposed that the Congress give Austria-Hungary a mandate to both occupy and administrate the two provinces and to keep garrisons in the Sand zak of Novi Pazar. Lord Salisbury supported Andr ssy's proposal while Great Britain claimed Cyprus. The Porte was abhorred by its so-called »friends'« demands and tried to avert them, but to no avail. Austro-Hungarian, British and German pressure proved insurmountable. The British representatives and Bismarck advised Andr ssy to send troops to Bosnia-Herzegovina without waiting for the Porte's assent, but Andr ssy did not want to move too quickly.⁶³ The Porte was allowed to save face by including a clause stipulating that the details of the occupation were to be agreed upon later.⁶⁴ Article XXV of the Treaty of Berlin said that

[t]he Provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be occupied and administered by Austria-Hungary. The Government of Austria-Hungary, not desiring to undertake the administration of the Sandjak of Novi-Pazar, which extends between Servia and Montenegro in a south-easterly direction to the other side of Mitrovitza, the Ottoman Administration will continue to exercise its functions there. Nevertheless, in order to assure the maintenance of the new political state of affairs, as well as freedom and security of communications, Austria-Hungary reserves the right of keeping garrisons and having military and commercial roads in the whole of this part of the ancient Vilayet of Bosnia. To this end the Governments of Austria-Hungary and Turkey reserve to themselves to come to an understanding on the details.⁶⁵

Article XXV of the Treaty of Berlin created a number of embarrassing ambiguities. What else than a *de facto* annexation could the »occupation« and »administration« of (a part of) one country by another possibly be? The international mandate in fact was the recognition by the international community of this *de facto* annexation. Significantly, in 1881 and 1882 the European Powers of their own accord gave up the economic and juridical privileges the Capitulations granted them, thus indicating they did not consider Bosnia-Herzegovina a part of the Ottoman Empire any more.

The international status the Treaty of Berlin had given to Bosnia-Herzegovina was not only impossible to implement, as Siccama points out;⁶⁶ in fact, as there were no international regulations, there was no status and nothing to

implement. In these circumstances, it was understandable that Austro-Hungarian state power filled the legal vacuum international law had created. Or, as Kraljačić phrased it, the relations of Bosnia-Herzegovina with the Monarchy evolved from an international law matter to a matter of internal, constitutional law.⁶⁷ This development was triggered off by the 22 February 1880 law on the administration of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which in many respects violated the Habsburg-Ottoman Convention of 21 April 1879, on the practical implementation of Article XXV of the Treaty of Berlin. For instance, after Bosnia-Herzegovina was incorporated into the imperial customs union (which implied that the revenues collected at the Bosnian-Herzegovian border could be spent anywhere in the Empire), the Ottoman currency was replaced by the Austro-Hungarian one. Ottoman functionaries were neither kept in service nor recruited in Bosnia as agreed upon, but mainly imported from Croatia and other Slav regions. The language used by the k.&k. administration was German. From 1882 onwards, male Bosnians were eligible for military service in the k.&k. army. Finally, for economic and administrative reasons, citizens from elsewhere in the Monarchy were encouraged to settle in Bosnia-Herzegovina. While the Austro-Hungarian authorities successfully avoided Bosnia-Herzegovina encroaching into the dual political structures, paradoxically, in all other matters the provinces were soon totally »absorbed« by the Monarchy.

The Porte found itself in a similar ambiguous situation. For instance, there were in practice no workable legal ways for the Ottomans to amend the Austro-Hungarian measures. The most common and appropriate way for the Porte to do so would have been the establishment of consulates in the major cities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. (Most Western Powers had consulates in the Ottoman Empire.) However, the Porte could not send consuls to a territory which nominally still belonged to her realm without implicitly renouncing to her title. (The Porte's representative in Sarajevo rarely stayed in the country and his interventions were either mostly obstructed or neglected by the Austro-Hungarian authorities.)

Partly due to these ambiguities and paradoxes as well, the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina was a tremendous success for Austria-Hungary. Playing a double game with Russia and Great Britain, and pursuing a policy oscillating between imperialist expansionism and self-defence against Pan-Slavic threat, the Dual Monarchy had gained Bosnia-Herzegovina without any warfare (except for the suppression of the fierce resistance offered by Bosnian Serbs and Muslims against the occupation). Moreover, she enjoyed all the strategic and economic advantages of taking over the two provinces without having to cope with any of the disadvantages. Mainly for fear of the internal consequences of an annexation, Austria-Hungary had opted for the occupation of the provinces. In the period preceding the Treaty, some Habsburg statesmen had even pleaded for leaving the provinces within the Ottoman Empire, only including them into

a customs union with the Dual Monarchy.⁶⁸ However, an occupation of the provinces did not threaten the dual structure of the Monarchy to the same extent as an annexation would have; annexation would raise the problem of whether Bosnia-Herzegovina had to be included into the Austrian or the Hungarian part of the Empire. From 1878 to 1908, therefore, Bosnia-Herzegovina remained a protectorate, ruled jointly by the Austro-Hungarian common institutions. Medlicott adds that an occupation (instead of an annexation) also made it easier »to avoid undertaking responsibility for the debts of the two provinces« and that the Dual Empire was confident »the annexation would come about naturally in course of time.«⁶⁹ Proposals to annex the province, forwarded in 1882, 1896 and 1907, were declined though, because of disagreements between the Austrian and the Hungarian part of the empire on questions of power distribution.⁷⁰

Among the external reasons for opting for an occupation, there was without doubt the fierce resistance of the Porte to annexation. Karatodori pasha agreed to the Habsburg occupation of the provinces only after Andr ssy had declared it was provisional and the sultan would maintain his sovereignty over them.⁷¹ However, the provisional nature of the occupation was deceptive since the Treaty had put no term to it; it was meant mainly to allow Karatodori pasha to save face once again. In addition, a »provisional« occupation and administration under an international mandate disguised the Austro-Hungarian expansionist designs and made them almost look as inspired by humanitarian concern. The Monarchy obviously felt obliged to provide a moral justification for the occupation, referring to the international mandate, to her civilizing mission on behalf of the Muslim population, and to the necessity of acting as a European stronghold against Pan-Slavism.⁷² Even the old Hungarian feudal rights on Bosnia were invoked.⁷³

The occupation was not meant to be provisional by Austria-Hungary and the Porte might have been well aware of this (although the earlier occupation of Wallachia and Moldavia by Russia had had indeed been provisional). Indeed local Muslims and Serbs – although in very divergent ways – also wishfully thought the occupation would one day come to an end. This explains their fierce reactions after the province was finally annexed in 1908.

Thus, the Austro-Hungarian occupation was the result of a manifold of divergent and often contradictory deliberations, which may appear as a well-considered and even cunning strategy, but in fact turn out to be rather hesitant or hazardous responses to changing opportunities. The Dual Monarchy pursued a Balkan policy balancing between its imperial or colonialist ambitions on the one hand and its internal weakness and divisiveness on the other, between collaboration and competition with Russia, between imperialist aggression and the anxiousness of a drifting state, between reluctance and deliberation to get involved in Bosnia-Herzegovina, while struggling to maintain within itself the shaky ba-

lance between its Austrian and Hungarian halves. The result of this ambiguous, but in the final analysis rewarding, policy was the acquisition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, whose status – internationally and within the empire – was just as indefinite. Was it still a part of the Ottoman Empire or was it already a part of the Habsburg Empire? Was it an international protectorate, an Austro-Hungarian colony or – from 1910 onwards – one of the Habsburg *Länder*? Even its being ruled by the k.&k. institutions maintained a useful kind of ambiguity avoiding its being assigned to either the Austrian or the Hungarian unit in a state where nearly everything else was indeed either Austrian or Hungarian. The knot of ambiguities which helped Austria-Hungary acquire Bosnia-Herzegovina eventually also helped her justify her appropriation in front of her own citizens (including these in Bosnia-Herzegovina) and the international community. This was probably the most dramatic paradox of the whole enterprise; admittedly the result of masterly diplomacy and sophisticated political engineering, the Austro-Hungarian occupation and ensuing annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina only increased the South Slav danger it was meant to keep at bay.

Notes

- 1 For a useful survey of these events cf. Haselsteiner, Horst: Grundzüge der Orientpolitik der Habsburgermonarchie Zwischen Kontinuität und Wandel. In: Haselsteiner, Horst (ed.): Bosnien-Herzegovina. Orientkrise und Südslavische Frage. Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 1996, pp. 9-14.
- 2 Cf. Jelavich, Barbara: History of the Balkans. Vol. I. Cambridge: Univ. Pr. 1983.
- 3 Cf. Jelavich, B.: Russia's Balkan Entanglements, 1906-1914. Cambridge: Univ. Pr. 1991, p. 96.
- 4 Cf. Kraljačić, Tomislav: Kalajev režim u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1882-1903 [Kállay's Regime in Bosnia-Herzegovina]. Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša 1987, p. 24.
- 5 Cf. Jelavich 1993, p. 114, p. 128.
- 6 Cf. Stavrianos, L.S.: The Balkans since 1453. London: Hurst 2000 [1958], p. 398.
- 7 Cf. Kann, Robert A.: A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918. Berkeley: Univ. of California Pr. 1977 [1974], p. 278.
- 8 Cf. Stavrianos 2000, p. 399.
- 9 Rumpler, Helmut (ed.): Österreichische Geschichte 1804-1914. Vol. 7: Eine Chance für Mitteleuropa. Ed. by Herwig Wolfram. Wien: Ueberreuter 1997, p. 446: »Österreichs

Aufgabe bleibe nach wie vor, ein Bollwerk gegen Rußland zu bilden, und nur solange es diese Aufgabe erfülle, sei sein Bestand eine europäische Notwendigkeit. « See also Medlicott, W. N.: *The Congress of Berlin and After*. London: Methuen & Co, 1938, pp. 7-9, for a discussion of anti-Slav and anti-Russian feelings in Austro-Hungary, especially among the Hungarians.

- 10 Haselsteiner, Horst: *Zur Haltung der Donaumonarchie in der orientalischen Frage*. In Haselsteiner, Horst: *Bosnien-Herzegowina. Orientkrise und Südslavische Frage*. Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1996, pp.15-30, quote p. 29.
- 11 Medlicott (1938, p. 27) thinks that Austria-Hungary was moved by the anxiety to prevent encirclement, rather than the desire to gain fresh territories, even at the eve of the Congress of Berlin,
- 12 Cf. Kann 1977, p. 354.
- 13 Cf. Malcolm, Noel: *Bosnia. A Short History*. London: Macmillan 1994, p. 136.
- 14 Haselsteiner 1996, p. 18-20.
- 15 Cf. Kraljačić 1987, p. 21, p. 23. Cf. also Haselsteiner, 1996, p. 19.
- 16 E.g. at the outbreak of the Crimean War. Cf. Kraljačić 1987, p. 19f.; Lampe, John R.: *Yugoslavia as History. Twice there was a Country*. Cambridge: Univ. Pr. 1996, p. 65.
- 17 Cf. Haselsteiner 1996, p. 16.
- 18 Kraljačić 1987, p. 34-35.
- 19 Cf. *ibid.* 1987, p. 34.
- 20 Cf. Anderson, M.S.: *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923*. London: Macmillan 1991 [1966], p.180.
- 21 Cf. Juzbašić, Dževad: *O uključenju Bosne i Hercegovine u zajedničko austrougarsko carinsko područje*. In: Institut za istoriju. *Prilozi* 18/19 (1982), pp. 125-60, quote p. 125.
- 22 Cf. Rumpler 1997, p. 447.
- 23 Cf. Kraljačić 1987, p. 37.
- 24 Cf. Diószegi, István: *Die Anfänge der Orientpolitik Andrássys*. In: *Der Berliner Kongress von 1878*. Edited by Ralph Melville and Hans-Jürgen Schröder. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982, pp. 245-56, p. 245ff.
- 25 Haselsteiner 1996, p. 17.
- 26 Quoted in Anderson 1991, p. 180.
- 27 Cf. Anderson 1991, p. 180.
- 28 Wertheimer, Eduard von: *Graf Julius Andrassy. Sein Leben und seine Zeit*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1910-1913, Vol. 2, pp. 259-60. Haselsteiner, 1996, pp. 24-25, Haselsteiner, who had access to unpublished protocols, is inclined to ascribe to Andrassy a greater extent of enthusiasm for the annexation of the provinces than traditional historiography does.
- 29 Cf. Stavrianos 2000, p. 399.
- 30 Cf. Lampe, John R. *Yugoslavia as History. Twice there was a country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 65.
- 31 Cf. Malcolm 1994, pp. 132, 137.
- 32 Cf. Rumpler 1997, p. 448.
- 33 Cf. Anderson 1991, pp. 180-181.
- 34 Cf. Stavrianos 2000, p. 400.
- 35 Cf. Anderson 1991, p. 183. Southern Bessarabia was annexed by Russia in 1829 and lost after the Crimean War.

- 36 Anderson 1991, p. 183.
- 37 Cf. Stavrianos 2000, p. 401; Weibel, Ernest: Histoire et géopolitique des Balkans de 1800 à nos jours. Paris: Ellipses 2002, p. 126f.
- 38 Wertheimer 1913, vol. 3, 1.
- 39 Malcolm 1994, p. 133; Stavrianos 2000, p. 397.
- 40 Petrovich, Michael B.: A History of Modern Serbia, 1804-1918. Vol. 2. New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1976, pp. 385-389.
- 41 Cf. Anderson 1991, p. 191.
- 42 Stavrianos 2000, p. 405.
- 43 Cf. Weibel 2002, p. 135.
- 44 The text of the Treaty of Reichstadt was published as *Bijlage A* (appendix A) in Siccama, Kornelis H.: De Annexatie van Bosnië-Herzegowina. Utrecht: Doctoral thesis 1950.
- 45 Wertheimer 1913, vol. 2, p. 384.
- 46 Anderson 1991, p. 186; Stavrianos 2000, p. 405. According to Haselsteiner, 1996, p. 28-29, the Emperor did not consider the Reichstadt Agreement as a real commitment. He was prepared to stick to it only if the Russians did so to and only as long as it did not harm Austro-Hungarian interests.
- 47 *Convention secrète entre la Russie et l'Autriche-Hongrie*. Bijlage B (Appendix B) in Siccama 1950, (n. p.).
- 48 Anderson 1991, p. 193.
- 49 Wertheimer 1913, vol. 2, p. 91.
- 50 Cf. Jelavich 1991, p. 171; Petrovich 1976, p.391.
- 51 Wertheimer 1913, vol. 2, p. 394.
- 52 Cf. Anderson 1991, p. 197.
- 53 Cf. Nastev, Georgi: Disraeli Lord Bikonsfild i osvoboždenieto na Bălgarija ot turskoto robstvo [Disraeli Lord Beaconsfield and the Liberation of Bulgaria from the Turkish Slavery]. Vol. 2. Sofija: Srebären lăv 1998, p. 75.
- 54 Cf. Petrovich 1976, p. 394.
- 55 Cf. Stavrianos 2000, p. 409.
- 56 Cf. Anderson 1991, p. 202; Siccama 1950, p. 3f.; Weibel 2002, p. 138. Medlicott, W.N.: The Congress of Berlin and After. London: Methuen & Co, 1938, pp. 15-16.
- 57 Medlicott, 1938, pp. 15-16.
- 58 Israel, Fred L. (Ed.): Major Peace Treaties of Modern History, 1648-1967. Vol. 2. New York: Chelsea House 1967, p. 967.
- 59 Cf. Siccama 1950, p. 3; Anderson 1991, p. 200.
- 60 Cf. Anderson 1991, p. 205.
- 61 Ibid., p. 207.
- 62 Medlicott, 1938, p. 42.
- 63 Ibid., p. 84.
- 64 Davison, Roderic H.: The Ottoman Empire and the Congress of Berlin. In: Meville/Schröder 1982, pp. 205-23, here p. 213.
- 65 Israel 1967, p. 985.
- 66 Cf. Siccama 1950, p. 9.
- 67 Cf. Kraljačić 1987, p. 39: »Dovoljno je samo da ukažemo na činjenicu se međunarodnopravni odnos Bosne i Hercegovine prema Monarhije sve više pretvara u

unutrašnji, državnopravni odnos.« [It suffices to refer to the fact that the relationship between Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Monarchy steadily evolved from a matter of international law into a matter of internal constitutional law.]

- 68 Cf. Juzbašić, Dževad. "O uključenju Bosne i Hercegovine u zajedničko austrougarsko carinsko područje." Institut za istoriju. Prilozi. 18 (1982), nr. 19, p. 131ff.
- 69 Medlicott, 1938, pp. 72-73.
- 70 Kapidžić, Hamdija: Diskusije o državnom pravnom položaju Bosne i Hercegovine za vrijeme austrougarske vladavine i pokušaj aneksije [The Discussion about the International Legal Status of Bosnia-Herzegovina during Austro-Hungarian Rule and the Attempt to Annexation.]. In: Glasnik arhiva i Društva arhivskih radnika Bosne i Hercegovine 4-5 (1965), p. 135ff.
- 71 Cf. Anderson 1991, p. 212, note 1. In August 1878, Andrassy arrogantly declared to the Council of Ministers: »Wenn *wir* selbst erklären, daß Dalmatien und Kroatien sichergestellt seien, daß die Reformen zur Verbesserung des Loses der Bevölkerung Bosniens und der Hercegovina durchgeführt, alle wirtschaftlichen Konsequenzen aus diesem Verhältnis durch die Handelsverträge usw. für uns gezogen seien – wenn *wir* dies alles tun und die Pforte Bürgschaften dafür bietet, daß sie diese Provinzen nach ihrer Uebernahme nicht wieder deterioriert, *dann*, d. h. *niemals*, könne von dem Ende der Okkupation die Rede sein. « (Wertheimer 1913, vol. 3, p. 158)
- 72 Cf. Kraljačić 1987, p. 21.
- 73 Cf. Haselsteiner 1996, p.20.